

MISSIONS AND MISSIONARIES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U. S, AMONG THE CHOCTAWS 1866-1907"

By Natalie Morrison Denison

During the decade from 1890 to 1900, thousands of white people come into Indian Territory. It was soon plain that statehood for the territory was eminent. So the college work in the mission schools was interracial, and the white people attended with the Indians.

Such was the Oklahoma Presbyterian College.

Durant, in the Choctaw Nation, was close to the Chickasaw line. Since it was on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, it soon became a place of importance. Here it was that the Oklahoma Presbyterian College was built.

The Reverend C. J. Ralston and his wife worked and taught at Armstrong Academy for a number of years. Their son, Calvin, had been born there. His parents were strong advocates of educational advantages, so they began saving toward their son's education. When only four years old, young Calvin strayed beyond the limits of Armstrong Academy. He fell into a deep pool and was drowned. At the time of this tragedy, 1892 the Ralston's school fund for their son amounted to over two hundred dollars. They decided to use the money for a memorial to their little

In 1894 the Assembly's Home Mission Committee planned to start a school at Durant. Mr. Ralston decided to give his memorial fund to this school, if the committee agreed to name it after his son. Also he wanted the property deeded to the Assembly's Committee. So the school was founded and called Calvin Institute.

From 1894 to 1896 the Reverend R. K. Moseley was head of the school. Many veteran missionaries were on the Board of Trustees, such as J. J. Read, W.J.B. Lloyd, and C. J. Ralston. The first President of the Board of Trustees was Doctor Robert A. Lively, for many years the Stated Clerk of Indian Presbytery. During these first two years the school progressed to such an extent that it was moved to a larger building further west on the main street of Durant.

The school came under the supervision of Mrs. Mary Semple Hotchkin and her son, Ebenezer, in 1896. The Board selected this useful woman, who had come to Indian Territory in 1857 as a

teacher. She was born in Ohio, in 1837, and had known every comfort. But when the call of the mission field came, she gave up her luxuries, and came to Wheelock to teach. She taught at Bennington, and then in the schools at Goodwater, Mayhew, Caddo, and Chickasaw in the Chickasaw Nation. While at Bennington she married Henry Hotchkin, son of the old pioneer missionary; some of their children became missionaries. Mrs. Hotchkin's consecrated life made her forty years of service of great usefulness to the Indians. Besides being a teacher, she worked as a friend, nurse, doctor, and spiritual advisor. Into her classroom at every station she carried the Bible; she taught the Bible just as she taught her regular school classes. At every mission school where she was stationed she read the Bible through. It was a habit of hers to give away marked copies of the New Testament. It is not surprising that when she died on August 31, 1917, her last words were: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet."⁹³

01 Anne R Semple, "Oklahoma Presbyterian College," Oklahoma Trails, p. 101.

@tMomson, The Red Man's Trail, op. cit. p. 107.

8s Semple, "Oklahoma Presbyterian College," The Red Man's Trail, op. cit.

Mrs. Hotchkin found the work hard at Durant. There was very little equipment, only a few desks and seats cut from rough logs. But through her efforts the work grew, and Durant, as well as the church, recognized its importance. In 1900 the school was able to secure a contract, so that Indian boys and girls could attend supported by tribal funds. As the city of Durant was very interested in the enlargement of the school, the Board of Trustees, with Doctor Thornton S. Sampson at the head, decided to build a brick school building. Many people in Durant gave liberal gifts, and with the support of the Assembly's Committee, this was done. A new location was selected near the northern edge of the city. As a dormitory was needed, the old frame school building was moved out to serve this purpose. It was no longer known as Calvin Institute, for the name was changed to Durant College. For the next eight years the school was operated on the co-educational basis; many Indian boys and girls received an education there.

The Reverend Ebenezer Hotchkin was the head of the school during this period, and has served the school for many years since that time. He was born on July 5, 1869, not far from Goodland,

and was reared and educated in the Indian country. Naturally he came to know and understand the Indian. His early education was received under his mother's instruction at Cadco. When yet a boy he attended the government Indian School, Haskell Institute, at Lawrence, Kansas. Doctor Hotchkin says today :94

"I am about half Indian in heart and mind. I still associate with them almost as much as I mingle with my white neighbors. I know their weaknesses and their strength, their problems and their desires, and am able to talk and advise with them when they bring their troubles to me, as many still do. Even the fullbloods, who are becoming rarer as the civilization of the white man encroaches on what I like to term the Indian civilization, count me as one of them."

After leaving Haskell Doctor Notchkin worked as a cow hand on the old Bar-Z ranch near Pauls Valley. In those stirring days the cattle business was dangerous, for there were white and Indian rustlers and negro outlaws. Many times the cowboys would have to fight these rustlers, and Mr. Hotchkin saw many of his associates shot. The cowboys had a code of ethics as to the use of obscene language around the camp house; anyone using such language was given twenty lashes with a wet rope. Mr. Hotchkin tells how he once violated the code and was unable to ride his horse for a week. He soon gave up this rough life, and finished his education at Park College, Missouri, and Fort Worth University in Texas. After marrying Miss Marriah Moore at Pauls Valley, he began his chosen work of preaching and teaching. He was evangelist for Indian Presbytery for a few years, but at the same time served a Bible teacher in the school at Durant. His life from that time until recently has been closely connected with the school.⁹⁵

During the period from 1900 to 1908, William Brown Morrison served as principal of the high school. Born near Lexington, Virginia, he attended and graduated from Washington and Lee University. He went to Beaumont, Texas, to teach, and was called from there to the work in the Durant College. His wife, Christine Barton Morrison, whom he had married in Beaumont, assisted him with his work as matron of the dormitory. They were connected with the school until 1905, when they went to Virginia to take up work there. However, in 1910, they returned, and Doctor Morrison was connected with the school for eight years as Pre~ident.~~ When Statehood came for Oklahoma in 1907, it was decided to operate the Durant College as a girl's school. The city of Durant

purchased the old property of the school, and offered a new site northwest of the city limits. A beautiful building was erected on a twenty acre campus, and everything was put in readiness for the opening of a new college. In 1910 the school became Oklahoma Presbyterian College for Girls.⁹⁷

When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, the Choctaw Nation passed out of existence as a separate political unit. From that time on Choctaw history has been closely connected with that of the State of Oklahoma. Many years had passed since their peaceful nation was disturbed by the white man. A long road had been traveled. With statehood came a better educational system. The missionaries had worked hard to bring the Indians into a civilized state. They had, to a large extent, prepared them for citizenship, but their work was not finished. The evil effects of the Civil War upon the Choctaw people finally were eradicated. Once again the faithful efforts of the missionary workers had helped their Indian friends through a dark and difficult period. But now another change had come, and the Indians needed help in readjusting themselves to a new civilization.

APPENDIX, (Choctaw Schools)

Before the Boarding Schools were re-opened, Superintendent Forbis LeFlore made the following report for the school year of 1868-1869 (See Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, C18691, p. 410) :

85 Personal interview with Dr. Ebenezer Hotchkin now living at Durant, Oklahoma.

fJ6 Personal interview with the late Dr. W. B. Moriison, Dep